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SUBJECT: NINEWA: THE HERO OF TAL AFAR

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REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Mayor of Tal Afar Najim Al Jubouri -- the hero of President Bush's March 20 speech in Cleveland -- is a rare leader in a country fraught with fear and uncertainty. His strong leadership, both as chief of police and mayor, helped clean up this city of a quarter-million people in northwest Iraq when it was overrun by terrorists and suffering from a decrepit infrastructure. He helped reform the police by making them more representative and accountable. He worked diligently with Coalition Forces and Iraqi Security Forces on counterinsurgency efforts in September 2005. However, he also fears what will become of him and his family once U.S. forces are drawn down in the country. He doubts his countrymen are prepared enough to fully understand democracy, and he questions the sincerity of Iraq's political leadership. He is afraid of sectarian and religious power in Baghdad, and believes that Iran has been behind ethnic tensions in the country. We wonder just how sustainable his efforts in Tal Afar might be once Iraq is left to fend for itself. End Summary.

2. (SBU) PRT PolOff met with Tal Afar Mayor Najim Abdullah Al Jubouri in Tal Afar on March 15.

PROFILE OF A STRONG LEADER

3. (C) Najim Al Jubouri prides himself on being a straight talker and risk taker. He has a history of doing the right thing for his country, often at the expense of his own and his family's personal safety. As chief of police for Tal Afar, Al Jubouri (known simply as "Najim") took an aggressive approach in reforming, training, and equipping the local police to better handle security in the area. His actions did not go unnoticed. An assassination attempt against him was thwarted by a bulletproof vest that proudly hangs on his wall, perhaps as a testament to his convictions or as a reminder of what could have been. Al Jubouri did not walk away from his job, but he did

move his family to safety in Baghdad and later to the west Kurdish town of Dohuk. In a city starving for leadership -- especially after its former chief of police, Ismael Faris, fled town leaving in his wake allegations of death and corruption -- Al Jubouri assumed the position of acting mayor in July 2005 (reftel). 3ACR Commanding Officer, Col H.R. McMaster, instantly identified with Al Jubouri and the two began a partnership that would ultimately benefit the city of Tal Afar. Al Jubouri presided over successful counterinsurgency efforts in September of last year, helping in planning and operations with Coalition (CF) and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).

14. (C) That today the dusty little city of Tal Afar has some of the highest levels of available electricity in Iraq and few shortages of potable water is Al Jubouri's work. Al Jubouri is part vigilante, part maverick. He believes he has to work in a system that does not appreciate the struggles of those living outside Iraq's larger cities. He claimed Tal Afar needed strong leadership to battle insurgents that overran it. He found that seeking help from what he saw as a feckless provincial government and a self-absorbed federal government was simply not an option. He said Tal Afar stood in marked contrast to Mosul, since schools were open, kids were playing in the streets, and basic services were met. According to Al Jubouri the central government was now controlled by "sectarians" and "opportunists," and for that reason he adamantly said he would rather report "directly to Washington." He credited the U.S. Army for keeping him alive, for helping to rid Tal Afar of terrorists, and for working to provide everything he needed to run the city.

MONUMENT TO U.S. INTERVENTION

15. (C) Al Jubouri appears to have grown accustomed to his direct access to CF and the USG. For this reason he said he was not preoccupied with issues that troubled other government officials, such as providing education, water, and electricity.

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Rather, he simply had bigger ideas for Tal Afar. "I want to construct a high-rise building like Times Square," he said. But if this were not possible a "large hospital would be nice." As a show of his respect and admiration for the USG he claimed his request should not be misunderstood: he just wanted to build something that Iraqis could look to as a monument of the U.S. contribution to the country. Al Jubouri said he believed the city of Tal Afar should be made an example for Iraq with something uniquely American.

SUNNI EXAGGERATIONS

16. (C) When asked about Sunni and Shia relations in the city, Al Jubouri, a Sunni Arab, said he admitted some Shia Iraqi Police (IP) officers were bad. However, he bitterly accused Sunnis of being "hypocrites" who "exaggerated" events to their advantage. He said that when the Golden Mosque in Samarra was bombed on February 22, Shias attacked mosques for a few days and then calmed down. He said, however, that if Shias had actually bombed an important Sunni shrine, like the Tomb of Abdel Qadir Qadelawi, there would have been "blood on the streets." Al Jubouri accused the predominantly Sunni, Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), of contributing to tensions between Sunnis and Shias. He claimed the IIP did not call for calm after the Samarra bombing, and instead "falsely" announced that three Sunni mosques had been bombed in Tal Afar instead.

"KILLER MISTAKES"

17. (C) Although Al Jubouri is clearly a friend of the U.S., he saved his harshest criticism for the USG and its actions in

Iraq. "The Americans made a few killer mistakes," he said, and the U.S. "should have never listened" to Ahmed Al Chalabi. They also should not have allowed sectarian Islamic parties to participate in the new government and to help write the constitution, he said. He claimed religious political party involvement in the new constitution had brought Iraq "back hundreds of years." Al Jubouri accused hard-line "religious" parties of being "more dangerous than Saddam Hussein." Since the U.S. was supporting all groups in Iraq, he said, it left the country vulnerable to a sectarian takeover. He claimed "Imams" were dictating politics and "destroying women's rights" by forcing them to "wear tents on their heads." He did not rule out what he claimed was the "strong influence of Iran" that had been contributing to tensions in Iraq. He said the ISF was "built incorrectly," since the USG was "training militias" instead of an independent army. As an example he said, "The IA in the north is supported by the Kurds." Lambasting the international media, Al Jubouri called the U.S. press "weak" for not reporting enough on "good stories" in Iraq, especially the work done by CF and the USG. "The U.S. spent a lot of money on schools," said Al Jubouri, "but most Iraqis believe the money came from the Iraqi Government." He claimed Iraqis loved the U.S. but that, too, was "never reported."

A FUTURE WITHOUT THE USG

18. (C) "I'll quit," Al Jubouri said immovably when questioned what he would do once CF troops were inevitably drawn down. Al Jubouri said he believed the Iraqi public was not educated enough to understand the profoundly "positive work" that had been done in Tal Afar. He even accused his fellow city councilmembers of being "more interested in helping themselves" than with caring about the city. Al Jubouri frankly said, "If it was not for the Coalition Forces we would not have anything."

STILL TIME TO "SAVE IRAQ"

19. (C) Despite his criticisms, Al Jubouri said he was holding out faith that all was not yet lost in the country. He suggested that the USG still had the power to affect the outcome in Iraq, but that it would have to act with a "frozen heart." Al Jubouri recommended that only a "secularist," like Ayad Allawi, could lead the country. He said he believed Allawi was the perfect candidate who would "work for everyone." "If you fixed the head, the whole body would be okay. But right now, things were lopsided," he claimed. Al Jubouri said democracy was a foreign concept for Iraqis, and that the democratic

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process would take time to develop. He claimed sectarian parties took advantage of people's religious and personal security fears. He said in Basra before the election, for example, the Shia coalition (United Iraqi Coalition #555) was marching through the streets carrying empty caskets, declaring voters "would die" if they voted for Allawi.

110. (C) When asked whether the invasion was worth the effort, Al Jubouri said the U.S. "won the fight but was losing the war." He compared the USG to a person standing in water up to his chest, looking in panic for a way out. Al Jubouri said the same tactics that worked to free Tal Afar from terrorism should also be applied to "liberate Iraq." He recommended the USG install a secular government under Allawi, change the constitution so that it "does not appear like the Koran," and prohibit religious parties from participating. He claimed that these changes would correct the problems in Iraq "within months." He asked that the USG free Iraq the way the Protestant Reformation liberated Europe. He compared life in Iraq and the Middle East today to that of Europe in the 16th and 17th Centuries, where "religious leaders ruled and repressed the people." Once the Europeans were freed, said Al Jubouri, the "whole world changed." And the

same could be done for Iraq.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Najim Al Jubouri is without a doubt a rare and brave leader, and a hero to the people of Tal Afar and Iraq. On a visit to a primary school with the mayor and members of 1/1AD, the students, teachers, and administrators received him with a welcome fit for a king. He firmly believes in "one Iraq," and when he enters a classroom the first question he asks is whether the students are "Sunni or Shia." The response, of course, is "We are Iraqis!" Although Al Jubouri is a living legend and positive example of bold leadership in a country fraught with fear and uncertainty, it seems that deep down he is aware that his efforts might be all for naught. This was confirmed when he repeatedly and firmly told us he would "quit" once CF left. We wonder how sustainable his successes will prove if and when the U.S. troops in his area are redeployed.

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